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January 26, 2015



Good afternoon, Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Urban, and members of the Committee on Children,

I am Rachel Morse, APRN, a family nurse practitioner and a few months into the 2014-2015 Nurse Practitioner Residency Program of Community Health Center, Inc. With the support of nurse practitioner, physician, and physician assistant preceptorship, I provide comprehensive primary healthcare to adult and pediatric patients at the Community Health Center of New Britain. I am writing today in my role as family nurse practitioner, to lend my support to Senate Bill 209, An Act Concerning Funding for the Reach Out and Read Program.

As a family nurse practitioner who sees pediatric patients, I view low literacy as a health problem. Like the approach to other health problems, the best strategy to deal with illiteracy is prevention. Reach Out and Read is a national program to promote literacy by changing the way pediatric clinicians practice medicine. Reach Out and Read gives care providers an evidence-based strategy to promote child development and learning. The program is highly economical, requiring little infrastructure, providing books purchased at a sharply discounted rate and relying on clinicians as an army of highly trained volunteers and trusted authorities to bring this important preventive strategy to families.

Though a new nurse practitioner, I have already seen the positive impact of giving books at well child visits. Beyond simply recommending and encouraging daily reading in the home, we are able to give parents the direct tool to accomplish just that. I have been able to show parents their child's developmental progress unfolding before them, from increasing language to honing fine motor skills. Reach Out and Read makes these special moments possible. I am proud to be starting out in my career by using this simple yet innovative approach to routine well child care.

The mission of Reach Out and Read is to make books and literacy guidance a routine part of pediatric primary care so that children grow up with a love of books and reading, with a special emphasis on children growing up in poverty. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) cited Reach Out and Read as a best practice program for book distribution and development of oral language and early literacy skills in the pediatric exam room in their 2014 policy statement, "Literacy Promotion: An Essential Component of Primary Care Pediatric Practice."



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The ROAR model is a scientifically validated model to promote literacy skills beginning at the early age of 6 months. Fifteen peer-reviewed research studies demonstrate important positive outcomes when families receive books and guidance through the ROAR program. By the age of 3, children born into low-income families hear roughly 30 million fewer words than their more affluent peers. Furthermore, 90% of brain development occurs between birth and age 5, serving as a critical window for learning. Reach Out and Read taps into and leverages this opportunity for learning.

In Connecticut alone, we serve nearly 40,000 children and families each year through 71 clinical locations. No community interested in the health and welfare of its children can be without Reach Out and Read. Parents need and want guidance about reading with their very young children and they need and want quality children's books. Reach Out and Read fulfills this crucial need and narrows the gap for our poorest families. The children deserve nothing less.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Rachel B. Morse, MSN, APRN, FNP-BC  
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